

## Continental Student Leadership Summit: A Catalyst for African Youth Action

Durban University of Technology recently hosted the Continental Student Leadership Summit, a transformative multi-day event that welcomed student leaders from institutions across Africa.



The summit brought together young changemakers from the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), Rhodes University, University of the Free State (UFS), Rhodes University, University of the Free State (UFS), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), Central University of Technology (CUT), University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), Sol Plaatje University (SPU), Vaal University of Technology (VUT), North-West University (NWU), University of Fort Hare (UFH), (UL), Tamale Technical University (Ghana), and the University of Nairobi (Kenya), among others.

In addition to critical conversations and interactive presentations, delegates visited the Nelson Mandela Capture Site and the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, adding symbolic and historical depth to the summit experience.

A highlight of the week was the vibrant gala dinner held on Thursday evening, themed "African Elegance." Dressed in a rich array of traditional attire, student leaders celebrated their cultural heritage with pride and joy. The event was both a cultural showcase and a bonding experience.

Dr Trishana Soni, a staff member from VUT, described the summit as "a holistic moment for youth leaders in South Africa and definitively on the continent." She applauded DUT's initiative, highlighting the importance of thought leadership in student governance and emphasised that student leaders must return home ready to implement change.

"This summit is not just about showing up. There needs to be accountability and action when we return to our respective institutions. This platform must translate into pathways for tangible impact," she said.



Dr Soni also raised the importance of mental health support for young leaders and expressed a desire to empower them with tools and skills to become peer educators and counsellors in their communities.

Mr Awande Mkhize from the University of Zululand echoed similar sentiments. He envisioned a unified, self-reliant Africa: "We must establish a Pan-African student leaders forum that generates and implements ideas for the improvement of the continent. Africa must trade and collaborate within itself to fully harness its natural wealth."

From Ghana, Mr Abraham of the University of Cape Coast reflected: "Transformational leadership in Africa requires resilience and a long-term mindset." He noted the shared challenges and aspirations among African youth, calling for visionary and inclusive leadership that stays grounded in the realities of the continent.

Ms Purity, representing the University of Nairobi, emphasised the value of cross-cultural dialogue: "Meeting students I had only heard of, and seeing everyone in traditional attire, was powerful. We are more similar than we think. The ideas we exchange here can become solutions that uplift the entire continent. Nothing is impossible think beyond the box; the box is a construct."

Mr Milkias from the University of the Witwatersrand offered a sobering yet hopeful perspective: "The current African diaspora is no longer as politically robust or educated as before. Social media has distanced us. But I still believe that 'good' always triumphs over 'bad.' Change will come we just have to be willing to work for it."



Mr Brandon Ncube of the University of the Free State spoke of plans for post-summit initiatives:

"We aim to advocate for cross-campus collaborations and initiate grassroots projects focusing on climate-smart innovation, ethical leadership, and Pan-African values."

Ms Sinovuyo Mdlungu, Manager of Leadership Development and Training at Nelson Mandela University, shared her reflections on the summit: "The desire for quality education, job opportunities, and ethical leadership came up often. What stood out for me was how many young people are already creating solutions in their communities." She added, "My role is to develop leadership modules and facilitate more platforms for dialogue. Connecting our students with their peers across the continent is essential to help them grow beyond our campus."

The summit was not merely a conference it was a catalyst for reimagining Africa's future. Delegates left with minds refreshed, perspectives expanded, and a renewed commitment to lead with purpose. For many, this was the beginning of a lifelong journey of impact.

The DUT Continental Student Leadership Summit served as a compelling reminder that Africa's progress depends on its youth. The time for action is now.